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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MASS](#) [SOCI](#) [CS](#)  
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: MEDRETE TREATS NEARLY 400 PATIENTS IN  
TURRIALBA REGION

REF: A. 08 SAN JOSE 800  
[1](#)B. 08 SAN JOSE 003

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. On September 11-12, Honduran-based Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) and Costa Rican medical personnel conducted a Medical Readiness Training Exercise (MEDRETE) in Costa Rica's remote, mountainous Turrialba region. Nearly 400 people received much-needed medical treatment. Three members of the national legislature, who were from the province where the MEDRETE took place, also participated. While visiting the MEDRETE site, the Charge d'Affaires was interviewed by national print and television media, which focused on the positive contributions of the U.S. to this joint humanitarian mission. Local leaders and patients deeply appreciated the assistance. END SUMMARY.

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AN "INVASION OF LOVE"  
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[1](#)2. (U) From September 11-12, over 50 JTF-B and Costa Rican medical and support personnel treated nearly 400 Costa Rican indigenous people in the Turrialba region, approximately 35 miles east of San Jose. At the first of the two sites, Tolokicha, 241 patients were evaluated and treated for various maladies. At Xichiari, the second site, 153 patients were treated. The most common illnesses found included acute upper and lower respiratory infections, ectoparasitic infections (scabies), skin infections, some malnutrition in children, intestinal parasitism, and diarrheal infections. In addition, the H1N1 virus was detected in two patients and another five had suspect symptoms.

[1](#)3. (U) In addition to general medical evaluations, dentists also provided oral exams and performed some basic dental work such as extractions. Also, each person evaluated received a preventative medical and hygiene packet that included items such as soap, insect repellent, and vitamins.

[1](#)4. (U) Most of the patients do not speak Spanish, but rather Cabeca, a local indigenous dialect. Five Embassy translators and GOCR translators assisted English-only speaking U.S. military medical personnel. No translation was needed though to express thanks, as evidenced from the smiles and gestures of grateful recipients of the assistance. Additionally, in a letter to the editor in Costa Rica's most respected daily newspaper, La Nacion, the writer thanked the CDA, Embassy, and SOUTHCOM for the "great medical and psychological assistance" provided to these patients. The writer continued and said that:

"Costa Rica, a country of peace, was the scene of a military invasion, in this case from the U.S., an invasion of love, solace, and humanitarian assistance to our ethnic peoples who need it so desperately."

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HELICOPTERS ATTRACTED PATIENTS  
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¶5. (U) Both MEDRETE sites were not easily accessible. The only way to get timely medical treatment to the people in these areas is by air; the only other way to get to the remote communities is by horseback or by foot, which takes at least one day. Because of a bridge that was washed out by floods last year, the mountainous locations have become even more isolated due to difficulties to get large amounts of supplies in. In addition to the general isolation of the area, the 3000 inhabitants in "nearby" villages often had to walk many hours to get to the centrally located MEDRETE sites. For example, one family of seven (with an eighth on the way) walked for over 90 minutes to seek medical assistance for the first time ever.

¶6. (U) Helicopters are the only efficient and effective way to travel. The presence of large and relatively noisy helicopters, such as JTF-B's UH-60 Blackhawks, also attracted dozens of patients who figured out (and word spread fast) that medical personnel were on the way. One 50-year old patient, Rafael Martinez, said that he had simply heard the helicopters and walked a couple of hours to see a doctor. He added that it had been two years since he had last seen one.

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MEDRETES HIGHLIGHT U.S.-COSTA RICAN COOPERATION  
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¶7. (U) As reported in Refs, MEDRETES are great examples of bilateral cooperation. Post's Office of Defense Representative (ODR) coordinated with many GOCR agencies to make this MEDRETE happen, but most importantly with the GOCR's Caja Social (similar to U.S. Social Security Administration, but additionally administers all of the public hospitals in Costa Rica), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Public Security.

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LEGISLATORS DO "VIP" VISIT  
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¶8. (U) Led by CDA Brennan, Post coordinated a VIP visit to the area with three Costa Rican legislators. The legislators all hailed from Cartago province, where the MEDRETE sites were located. They represented three political parties (the National Liberation Party-PLN, the Citizen Action Party-PAC, and the Libertarian Movement-ML) and deeply appreciated the assistance that the USG brought to their constituents.

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POSITIVE AND SUSTAINED MEDIA COVERAGE  
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¶9. (U) Thanks to the coordination of Post's Public Affairs section, positive coverage of the MEDRETE continued in various media outlets for nearly two weeks after the conclusion of the event. Four print/internet media and two TV stations sent reporters, with transportation provided by JTF-B helicopters, to the remote sites and conducted numerous interviews, including Spanish language interviews of CDA Brennan and ODR personnel.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (SBU) The positive contribution to overall bilateral relations between Costa Rica and the U.S. due to MEDRETES is hard to overstate. Post has supported a sustained tempo of 2-4 MEDRETES per year over the past two years that has opened many doors and made believers out of doubters on the use of U.S. military personnel in the region. With a near withdrawal of all participation of any Costa Rican police

officials in U.S. military training facilities via the IMET program two years ago (at places such as Fort Benning, Georgia where WHINSEC is located), to U.S. military medical personnel and aircraft flying in Costa Rican airspace, the transformation of attitudes has changed greatly. Our "invasions of love" have generated a lot of goodwill.

11. (U) Post sends a special thank you to the men and women of JTF-B who made it all happen. Their medical professionalism and ambassadorship benefited both patients and USG goals in the region. Kudos for a job well done!  
BRENNAN